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DAKAR FOR USAID/OFDA/RDAVIS AND JSCICCHITANO
BAMAKO FOR USAID/WARP HBOTTEMBERG;
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH/USAID
HHS FOR OGHA (STEIGER)
BRUSSELS FOR USAID/PLERNER AND APHIS/PFERMANDEZ
PARIS FOR GCARNER
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VIENNA PASS APHIS
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FROM THE U.S. MISSION TO THE UN AGENCIES IN ROME

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: WEEKLY UPDATE ON FAO ACTIVITIES
#3 FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 17, 2006

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Sensitive but unclassified - please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Summary: On March 16, USMISSION UN ROME staff met with various members of FAO's Animal Production and Health Division (AGA) and Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) for an update on Avian Influenza (AI) operations worldwide as well specific country programs. Much of this information has not yet been released publicly nor has it been officially verified; it should be protected accordingly. Staff reported that:

-- Azerbaijan: HPAI has been confirmed in swans in four locations on the Caspian Sea, and in domesticated poultry in four commercial farms. The Government of Azerbaijan reported to FAO that humans who contracted the disease did so from illegal hunting and eating wild swans. Isolates from samples collected in Azerbaijan show a molecular evolution. Cat and dog mortalities have also been reported, with a confirmation of HPAI in one dog. An FAO representative is in country to conduct a preliminary assessment in preparation for an international mission comprised of the European Commission, OIE and FAO;

-- Nigeria: In order to avoid any internal control or influence by the Government, a Nigerian national based in Rome has been recruited to work as an FAO international consultant;

-- Niger: A "sanitary" border between Niger and Nigeria is being established. Nigerians have bought poultry from Jema village in Niger; and

-- Recruitment of International Staff and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): FAO is in the process of finalizing the recruitment of 13 additional staff to be deployed internationally. FAO also reported that its PPE kit is sized for 500 persons and one kit has been ordered for 65 countries, but has been experiencing delivery delays.
End Summary

Azerbaijan

2. (SBU) FAO animal health experts in confidence provided us information not yet publicly released that, from March 13-17, FAO's Ankara-based representative is in country to conduct a preliminary assessment in preparation for next week's fielding of a week-long international mission. The Ankara-based representative has been working with the Azerbaijani chief veterinary officer (CVO), national veterinary service and related government ministries on developing field assessments, risk analysis and determining requisites for a national strategy. Initial feedback to FAO/HQ indicates that there has been no real reporting of poultry die offs, most likely due to the lack of surveillance, the weakness for which can largely be

attributed to political factors between the Government of Azerbaijan (GoA) and its poultry industry.

13. (SBU) FAO/HQ stated that the eastern part of Azerbaijan is the most worrisome and will need to be systematically surveyed. Unfortunately, the GoA was not proactive like its neighbors Iraq and Iran, and its slow wake-up on the need for active surveillance and collection of baseline data triggered the exposure to humans, leading to multiple human deaths. Moreover, FAO reported on disconcerting rumors being tracked of cat as well as dog mortalities, and the increasing evidence of changes in the viral genome that facilitate transmission to other mammals, referring to a comparative analysis of isolates collected from Azerbaijan to those isolates retrieved in Turkey.

14. (SBU) According to FAO, the GoA has stated that humans became infected by handling and eating dead/hunted wildbirds. Samples taken from dead poultry in villages where human deaths occurred were tested by PCR and turned out to be negative for H5N1. National veterinary services are now saying it is Newcastle disease.

15. (SBU) At present, HPAI has been confirmed in swans in four locations on the Caspian Sea (Turkan, Balagary, Garadakh, Khyurdalan), all situated on the Absheron peninsula near Baku. HPAI has also been confirmed in domestic poultry in four commercial farms: the first two in Khizy District (one near Geyliazy village and the other in Arko Co, which is a branch of the farm in Geyliazy); the third in Belasuar District (Samedabad); and the fourth in Fyziuli District. HPAI was also confirmed in a dead dog found in the Binagadi area outside Baku. FAO reports that the national veterinary service has imposed a quarantine and is carrying out disinfection in infected premises.

16. (U) On March 20-24, FAO will join the OIE and the European Commission on a joint rapid assessment mission to Azerbaijan to provide emergency technical assistance as well as technical requirements for planning a national animal health strategy. The four-person mission will gather for analysis information on active poultry foci. An investigation into poultry industry practices will be made part of the mission's terms of reference as well. USMISSION UN ROME has suggested that FAO hold a donor debrief in Baku upon completion of service.

17. (U) Beginning March 28, FAO plans to post a highly-qualified Iranian veterinary/epidemiologist in Baku for an initial five-month assignment. The expert, who previously worked as the FAO CVO in Tehran, is known for his linguistic skills, including several Caucasian dialects, and receives high remarks for his diplomatic as well as trust-building skills, both of which will be needed in Azerbaijan. FAO is also examining the option of fielding its Turkey-based virologist to Azerbaijan, but only if there is no disruption or negative impact to ongoing activities in Turkey.

18. (U) Lastly, TCE is in the process of preparing a regional proposal for the control of HPAI in the Caucasus. The proposal will be prepared in a modular way so that multiple donors can select funding a particular program of interest.

Nigeria

19. (U) AGA staff reported that the Government of Nigeria (GoN) has been sensitized to compensation for backyard poultry farms. Two compensation systems are being considered: on-the-spot compensation for smaller farms and a voucher system for larger farms. Apparently, FAO is now in the driver's seat on this issue (as compared to previously when OIE and AU-IBAR were also competing) and will send a consultant there in two weeks to tweak the details.

10. (SBU) TCE staff reported that, in order to avoid any internal control or influence by the GoN, a Nigerian national based in Rome has been recruited to work as an FAO international consultant. He and the two other Nigerian nationals already working under FAO in-country will tie in AI activities to the FAO/OIE Global Framework for Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) program already underway there. Plans are also underway to recruit an epidemiologist/veterinarian as well as a rural information specialist to work on logistics at the federal level and strengthen the ECTAD country unit. In addition to discussing and preparing project proposals with the USAID Mission in Nigeria, FAO held discussion with the EC and CIDA on funding of activities, particularly relating to the preparation of joint statement or plan of action. The African Development Bank also expressed interest in funding a package of assistance. The FAO Representative (FAOR) will take the lead in donor coordination to develop a central ECTAD strengthening program and avoid scattered programming activities.

Niger

¶11. (U) Niger: An AGA staff member who returned on March 15 from a week-long mission in Niger first briefed on the FAO-sponsored two-day veterinary training workshop in Niamey from March 9-10. The workshop had a dual focus, HPAI surveillance and control and Newcastle disease, and was attended by 100 veterinarians, who were each provided with two take-home Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits.

¶12. (SBU) USMISSION UN ROME also received an overview of the epidemiological situation as well as his assessment of a field mission conducted from March 11-12, which follows:

-- Zinder region: two cases of H5N1 were confirmed in ducks in Galawa Rouga, Magaria. (Samples from a dead chicken, meanwhile, proved positive for Newcastle disease.) Culling measures were supposed to have begun in Magaria, but due to the delay in response, most of the poultry died and no compensation plan has yet been approved.

-- Goure: a high mortality of ducks was reported, but no samples have been collected; a medium mortality of chickens was reported with samples collected and transferred to the national lab.

-- N'Guigmi, Diffa region: a high mortality of wild birds was reported. A CIRAD team took samples from six birds; results are pending.

-- Birni N'Konni, Tahoua region, Jema village: high mortality of chickens was reported; the regional lab in Tahoua collected samples for analysis by the national lab. All dead birds were burned, but no control measures have been applied to live birds. No poultry was sold to surrounding villages in Niger, but poultry was bought by Nigerians from the Nigerian sister village of Jema. No buffer was put into place around Jema village, and people and vehicles are freely circulating. Meanwhile, in surrounding villages, poultry were seen roaming freely. In these villages, public awareness of AI was generally described as good. There have been radio PSAs and an assessment of overall hygiene measures has been done with the local population.

-- Dosso: samples of dead wild ducks and heron in W Park were sent to the national lab and to the FAO/OIE reference lab in Padua, Italy. No suspicion of AI in domestic poultry has been reported.

¶13. (SBU) One major contribution by FAO is the preparation and setup of a disease collection template as there was no systemic tracking at either the national or regional level. FAO also raised the question of vaccination, and the Government expressed a willingness to vaccinate. A proposal is also being prepared with the Government to enhance surveillance along the border with Nigeria and in high-risk areas with a high density of wild birds. The idea is to create a type of "sanitary" border where vaccinations against both HPAI and Newcastle disease can be carried out.

¶14. (SBU) Despite these efforts, the main issue relates to a major lack of equipment. Surveillance in Niger, and most likely other African countries, suffers from the lack of equipment and resources to investigate HPAI at the village level. For this reason, the FAOR has distributed petrol vouchers to central authorities for distribution to regions in an effort to reach villages for surveillance purposes. The FAOR is also currently purchasing disinfectant and evaluating the possibility of using sprayers from the desert locust campaign in the AI campaign as well. We were told that 1,000 PPEs in all have been delivered to Magaria where H5N1 has been confirmed, while the French have distributed very limited quantities of PPEs, disinfectant and sampling kits. Delays in delivering equipment to regional posts also comes at the expense of villagers. The Nigeriens are well trained in the technical aspects of surveillance and control of HPAI, but lack national measures and infrastructure to apply this expertise. The FAOR will take the lead on donor coordination in Niger as well and has been discussing with the EC the possibility of setting up a logistical network that will work like a public food distribution system to supply equipment.

TCE Update: PPE and recruitment of staff

¶15. (U) TCE staff stated they are in the process of finalizing recruitment of 13 technical staff for deployment at the country level in Bamako, Nairobi, Cairo, Budapest and elsewhere. Staff working on AI in Rome has been augmented by 18 persons who cover programming and planning, procurement and contracts, monitoring and finance, public

information and dissemination, and geographical regions. The process of recruitment both internationally and locally has been improving.

¶16. (U) TCE also reported that FAO's PPE kit is sized for 500 persons and one kit each has been ordered for 65 countries. Currently, FAO's most common problem with suppliers relates to delivery time, with a range of 4-12 weeks at an average cost of \$20 per kit. USMISSION UN ROME has provided copies of USAID PPE component specifications to FAO in an effort to link the organization to the system being used by USAID Missions worldwide.

¶17. (U) USMISSION UN ROME will continue to disseminate widely FAO activities to combat and control Avian Influenza.

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